HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on National Defence

NDDN • NUMBER 106 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, September 20, 2018

Chair

Mr. Stephen Fuhr

Standing Committee on National Defence

Thursday, September 20, 2018

● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

I would like to welcome everybody to our first public meeting of the defence committee after the constituency break. We had one in camera meeting, but since we're in public I would like to formally welcome our new permanent members of the committee.

MP Dzerowicz, thank you and welcome. MP Martel, thank you. We have MP Boucher subbing in today for Mr. Bezan.

Welcome to our new parliamentary secretaries, Serge Cormier and Stéphane Lauzon.

We're here to continue our discussion on Canada's contribution to international peacekeeping. Our guest witness today is Dr. and Professor Baruah. Thank you for coming.

I will turn the floor over to you for your introductory remarks.

Dr. Bipasha Baruah (Professor, University of Western Ontario, As an Individual): Thank you for giving me this opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on National Defence. I am a tenured full professor in the Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research at the University of Western Ontario. I also hold the Canada research chair in global women's issues.

In November of last year I wrote an op-ed in Policy Options. My original title for the op-ed was "A few good women: A reality check for Canada's peacekeeping pipe dream", but I noticed that the editors decided to publish it with the more straightforward title of "Short-sighted commitments on women in peacekeeping". This is a topic I've maintained an interest in for a very long time. In the op-ed that I wrote, I shared my concerns about the way that women's role in peacekeeping is being packaged and curated. I'll do the same in my comments today.

One of the highlights of the UN peacekeeping defence ministerial conference hosted by Canada in 2017 was the announcement of a five-year pilot fund, worth $15 million, that would be used to recruit, train and promote female military and police personnel for United Nations peacekeeping missions. In making this commitment, Ottawa takes its cues from and throws its weight behind United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which was passed in the year 2000. Resolution 1325 urged all member countries to increase the participation of women in peacekeeping operations, or PKOs. It also called on all parties in conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict.

The central premise of UNSCR 1325 is that increasing the number of women in a peacekeeping operation will improve the operational effectiveness of the mission. The resolution assumes that appointing or recruiting more women leaders, decision-makers, military or police officers, and soldiers is a means of better protecting the safety and rights of women and girls in the countries in which PKOs are deployed. It assumes that female victims of sexual violence will be more comfortable speaking to and being protected by female peacekeepers. Incorporating more women into peacekeeping missions was also a way for the UN to counter mounting evidence of sexual abuse and exploitation committed by male peacekeepers. Thus, by having a "civilizing" effect on their male colleagues, the presence of women peacekeepers was expected to lead to lower levels of sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping missions.

The notion that women are not just inherently more peaceful than men but are also able to pacify male violence is empirically not well verified, but it continues to inform current policy on women and peacekeeping. Historian Gerard DeGroot, a vocal advocate for the inclusion of more women in peacekeeping operations, argues that women in armed groups appear to have a "civilizing effect" on men by preventing undesirable male behaviour, including sexual aggression and abuse. In a keynote address he made to UN officials in 2010, DeGroot said that women can improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations for the simple reason that they are not men and that women, it seems, are less inclined toward violence.

While not stated explicitly in DeGroot's remarks, the central assumption is that women can essentially shame men into behaving more appropriately. There's very little empirical evidence to support these assumptions, but they have acquired the status of truism without much verification. However, there is evidence that women's presence in small numbers or even significant numbers does not have any influence upon men's behaviour. For example, based on her research in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dara Cohen, a researcher at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, finds that when faced with similar social constraints and pressures, women are as capable of perpetrating abuse as their male peers.

Just to be clear, my argument is not that women or men are natural perpetrators of violence or abuse, but rather that under certain conditions, both sexes may be prone to such behaviours.

That many of the assumptions justifying women's increased participation in peacekeeping operations, that they are less corrupt, for example, and less prone to sexual violence or abuse, do not often hold water in practice is a fact that should not be so surprising, since the number of uniformed women personnel in peacekeeping operations is still extremely small.

● (1105)

In August 2018—these are the most recent figures—women made up just under 4%, or 3.95% to be precise, of military peacekeepers, and 11.2% of police personnel in global peacekeeping operations. This is far short of the target of 20% by 2014, which was set by the UN Police in 2000.

Research on employment and social equity in other male-dominated occupations indicates that a workplace must have at least 15% women to reduce what is called the minority effect, and ideally aim for 30% to obtain demonstration effects of critical mass.

Women are burdened in multiple ways in certain industries, including in peacekeeping operations, where they are heavily under-represented, but treated as change agents, i.e., where they are expected to lead the way in changing entrenched masculine work cultures. In such environments, women often face the predicament of being considered more nurturing and less bellicose than men, either by their nature or through socialization. These are qualities that ironically have traditionally been perceived as making women unsuitable for military and police forces, while they simultaneously find they are being included in these institutions for possessing the same qualities.

There are much-publicized accounts of women peacekeepers carrying out community service and outreach activities in host settings, especially with the recent deployment of all female peacekeeping units—for example, Indian women in Liberia, and Bangladeshi women in Haiti. There are greater opportunities for systematic research to understand what contributions female military and police personnel make, and whether they are any different from the contributions made by male peacekeepers. There has never been any doubt that both civilian and military peacekeepers can make very meaningful contributions to peacekeeping operations.

If compassion, empathy and sensitivity to local populations are important attributes of peacekeepers—I agree they are—then why can't we train all peacekeepers, regardless of gender, to be compassionate, empathetic and sensitive? Why are these seen as attributes that can only be brought in intact by women?

In pointing out the problems with essentialist assumptions about including women in peacekeeping, I must be very cautious not to provide ammunition to misogynists and anti-feminists, who would rather women not be present at all in military and police forces. Those of us who are skeptical of the operational effectiveness rationale for increasing the number of women in peacekeeping are not at all against women's participation in peacekeeping. We just express doubt about the way in which it is packaged. As a researcher, I obviously have the job of asking critical questions, even of policies that I support.

Women make up 50% of Canada's and the world's population. They should be as self-justifiably entitled to jobs in peacekeeping operations as men are, without bearing the additional burden of "civilizing" missions and improving operational effectiveness. Having more women peacekeepers contributes to the goal of a gender-equal, more representative peacekeeping mission. Gender equality and representativeness should be ends in themselves, and not means toward somewhat misguided ends.

I know that advocates of the operational effectiveness argument may find these critiques quite frustrating. They may even find them exasperating. They say we should get the job done and ask if it matters that we're doing the right thing for the wrong reason.

I would argue that an important step toward gender equality in peacekeeping is to appreciate that distinction between a rights-based argument, and an instrumental argument. After all, if we increase the number of women in peacekeeping operations and find that we still have high levels of sexual exploitation and abuse and that the women have not been able to transform these institutions, are we then justified in asking women to leave?

In closing, I would like to emphasize that gender is not the only relevant marker of identity among peacekeepers. Class, race, religion, education, language, ethnicity and nationality all figure very heavily in the identity of peacekeepers. In any conversation about diversifying peacekeeping missions, we must pay close attention to them.

Thank you for listening.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your very important remarks.

I'm going to turn the floor over to MP Robillard. He will have seven minutes for the first question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would especially like to thank Ms. Baruah for her testimony.

I will ask my questions in French, of course.

What factors explain the general exclusion—

[*English*]

The Chair: Sorry; hang on a second while we get translation for the professor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: I'll start again. What factors explain the general exclusion of women from peace processes keeping and decision-making designed to resolve and recover from conflicts?

[*English*]

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: If I'm assuming rightly, you're asking me what factors lead women to be excluded from peacekeeping processes.

I don't think I have a simple answer for that. Having been doing this research for a long time, I have found that one of the biggest problems is the general assumption that women are not involved in conflict. That doesn't actually serve us very well, because women are involved in conflict as well. Obviously they must also be part of peacekeeping solutions.

I think it's gendered assumptions about who fights and who doesn't that have for a long time kept women out of peacekeeping missions. We're increasingly finding that in studies of conflict from around the world, women are not just camp followers. They aren't just women who are wives and mothers, associates of fighters, for example. They have been involved pretty actively in conflict. Therefore, I think it's very important to also consider them in solutions to peacekeeping.

A more generalized response is that in the past, women were never at the table for a lot of conversations about peacemaking, although they've obviously played very important roles, even in ending civil war, in many countries. The prime example is Liberia, in which women were absolutely instrumental in ending armed conflict.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

What are the main advantages of increased participation by women in United Nations peacekeeping operations?

[*English*]

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: That's the one that I really struggle with, because, given the structures of peacekeeping operations and given the structures of militarized peacekeeping, I don't see how introducing small numbers of women can make a difference to peacekeeping operations.

Having said that, I think women have a right to a seat at the table regardless of whether they can contribute in different ways. Even if their contributions are very similar to those made by men, male peacekeepers, they have every right to be there.

I think we should work from that approach of thinking about a rights-based argument for why women should be there. I think equity is worth fighting for in and of itself. If they get there and we find that institutions also change.... There is so much research that suggests that institutions benefit from diversity, not just gender diversity but from diversity of all kinds.

When we think about those benefits, we should be thinking about them as perhaps nice to have, but we shouldn't design policy based on them. I think women should be there regardless of whether they make different contributions to peacekeeping missions.

● (1115)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

How should allegations of sexual exploitation involving UN peacekeepers and other types of personnel be dealt with by the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary-General, the UN system as a whole and member states?

[*English*]

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: Can you repeat that for me, please?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: How should allegations of sexual exploitation involving UN peacekeepers and other types of personnel be dealt with by the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary-General, the UN system as a whole and member states?

[*English*]

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: I think a broader conversation about power is really important. Most sexual abuse is not about the things people think about. It's not about sexual gratification. It is about power. I think people are put in positions of power—inherently, of power over others—which is why I think it's very important to have a much deeper conversation about power. That conversation about power will open up a lot of doors that have remained closed so far.

People haven't really explored ideas about the power between peacekeeping forces and host populations, for example. I think a much deeper conversation is necessary to be able to understand why it happens and to figure out ways to prevent it from happening. Of course, policies of zero tolerance are all very useful, but the point I would like to make is that policy by itself often doesn't transform institutions. There has to be a changing of minds and hearts. As long as peacekeepers are in positions of power over their host populations and as long as there are perceptions of impunity, I don't see how it's going to stop happening.

There isn't much evidence to suggest that increasing the numbers of women in peacekeeping missions actually makes any difference. I haven't looked specifically at peacekeeping operations, but I've looked at other situations of conflict. It's very interesting, because when you look at other armed groups—for example, armed groups that include both women and men—there's really no correlation. There are groups that have large numbers of women, and we still see fairly high levels of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The other thing to keep in mind is there's a theory that often you may not get as much sexual exploitation or abuse if you have more women within certain groups, because then perhaps there is the potential for people to have sexual relations that don't involve coercion. I find that really troubling. That's a very strange situation to put women into, in those contexts.

The Chair: You were looking at me to see how much time you had left. That response ate up the little time you had left, so I'm going to have to move on to MP Gallant.

Just as a reminder to everyone, if someone sees this, you have 30 seconds to wind down gracefully and we have to move on.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, and thank you for your presentation.

I want to clarify that the context in which you're giving testimony here at the Canadian standing committee. You have made reference that peacekeeping is a mission and peacekeepers are soldiers. You mentioned policing, so I wanted to clarify: Are we talking about military policy or civilian police?

You are saying we are talking military.

We've been told in this committee during our study of peacekeeping that there are really no peacekeeping missions in the old sense of the word and that now they are really peacemaking missions.

For the purpose of this study, were you specifically referring to Canadian soldiers?

● (1120)

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: Frankly, there isn't enough evidence to tell us specifically about.... There is some research of our Canadian peacekeeping operations, but in general I would say there definitely isn't enough research to suggest that women in Canadian peacekeeping would make contributions that are different from male peacekeepers.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are Canadian male soldiers somehow involved in the sexual exploitation of the people inside the host country?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: I haven't chanced upon that research yet, but there is a generalized culture of sexual exploitation and abuse within peacekeeping operations.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: If we're inserting Canadian female soldiers into a peacekeeping mission for the purpose of having a calming effect, if our soldiers are on the straight and narrow anyhow, why are they being segregated out for reasons other than being soldiers?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: I completely agree. I have absolutely no argument with the fact that women need to be in peacekeeping missions. The issue I have is with expecting different results from having women in peacekeeping operations. I absolutely agree there is no reason for it.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: You see the hypocrisy in claiming to advance gender equality but using that paternalistic attitude towards our assignments?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: Yes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Is it fair to our women in uniform—most of who joined the Canadian Forces for the exact same reasons as their male compatriots—to be put in administrative or PR roles?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: That's a difficult one for me to answer, because I haven't actually researched whether or not women liked being in those positions, or whether they prefer to be. Peacekeeping itself is often seen by trained military personnel as being kind of a step down from active combat in many cases. I think that's something for individual women to respond to, whether or not they think that's fair to be put into administrative or public relations positions.

Generally, I completely agree that women are wholly justified in wanting to be in peacekeeping missions, or wanting to be in the military or on the police force for the exact same reasons as men, whatever they may be. They want good jobs. They want to fulfill their personal ambitions. They want to travel. That's the issue that really troubles me. It's having these very different expectations of women.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Then keeping most female Canadian Armed Forces members in support roles rather than letting them serve on the front lines reinforces gender bias, regardless of how many more women are serving in a mission.

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: I agree.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: You've stated that modern militarized peacekeeping missions the UN undertakes is an oxymoron, which continues the theme we've heard from other witnesses that the nature of peacekeeping has changed a great deal from the days of the Golan Heights and Suez.

Can you elaborate on the state of peacekeeping missions today?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: I would say empirically the findings are quite mixed, because there is still evidence of a lot of the issues I mentioned about power between peacekeeping operations and host countries. They absolutely still exist, so I'm not entirely convinced that we're in a golden era of new peacekeeping. I would have to look into that question specifically to find that answer.

I do think that, in and of itself, it is a practice with which we perhaps want to have a deeper engagement and of which we want to be more critical, because militarized peacekeeping itself is an oxymoron. You're relying on militaries to keep the peace, and I appreciate that they are often necessary in the short term, but I'm not convinced that if were to do a longitudinal study of peacekeeping operations from the time they came into being, UN peacekeeping operations.... They've diffused conflict temporarily, but I'm not absolutely certain that they've enabled us to move towards a genuine idea about peace.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Canada's participation in the peacekeeping mission—so-called peacekeeping mission—in Mali is part of this government's push for a UN Security Council seat. Given the dangerous nature of this mission, is it in the national interest to risk the lives of the women and men in uniform for a seat on the body that you describe as an institution that is itself in need of deep institutional reform?

● (1125)

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: No, it's not, not in my opinion. I should provide a more complicated answer.

The UN is in deep need of reform, and I say this as someone with incredible faith in the multilateral process and in multilateral institutions. However, I can believe in multilateral institutions and processes while simultaneously stating that they need to be reformed.

I'm sure that the P5 architecture worked very well in 1949 with the inclusion of the five permanent members, but today, in 2018, it absolutely does not reflect a multipolar world. With Canada now wanting, for example, the two-year, non-permanent Security Council seat, that's fine. I understand that's the structure we're working with now. That's the only vehicle we have, so I understand why Canada's trying to get on to the Security Council. We haven't been on it for 20 years, if I remember rightly. I understand that, but it's like asking for a seat at a table rather than asking for the table itself to be reformed. That does trouble me.

At the same time, I understand that we operate in smaller, shorter frames of time. Yes, we are making a bid for 2021 to 2023, and I'm perhaps okay with that, but I think that we should still be able to ask for reform while being cognizant of the fact that there is a push for that seat.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to Professor Baruah for being with us today and bringing a fresh perspective to our hearings.

I have to say that I think you've made a very important point of the presumption that women will have an extra task, and that's reforming men.

As a gay man, I often find that the group defines another group as other, and then assigns that other the task of educating them. If I'm right, I think that's one of the important points you're trying to make this morning. There's no reason that this.... It should be an institutional task of attacking these, and not the job of women who are actually on the job.

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: I see it as something that is well-intentioned but misguided.

I think the trouble with positive gender essentialisms is that people don't question them enough. If you were to go around saying that all women are something or other, and if it's a very negative quality, you would have a lot of people obviously challenge you, but often we need to also challenge affirmative gender essentialisms.

I don't think we're doing that enough. One of the other things I think about is that a part of military training is breaking down the idea of the individual identity in favour of a group or collective identity. That's true regardless of gender if you're in the military, so why do we assume that women will somehow be able to maintain some kind of individuality that will enable them to challenge the group or the collective when military training is designed to break down the individual in favour of the collective?

It's just something that doesn't add up.

Mr. Randall Garrison: It also adds an extra layer of complexity for the women who are trying to participate fully.

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: We know there is extensive research in a variety of male-dominated occupations showing that women, ethnic minorities and religious minorities tend to try to fit in with the majority. They don't challenge. It's obvious why: it's difficult for a person challenge when there isn't a critical mass of that group of people. To me, it's a well-intentioned but misguided understanding of what women can do in these situations.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you for that. I think it's an important point for us.

Just before that, you mentioned another argument for including women in peacekeeping operations. You said that victims are more likely to feel comfortable dealing with people who look like them in some ways. You passed over that in your presentation, so could you talk a little bit more about it? Do you find evidence of that?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: I wouldn't say there is no evidence. There is some evidence, for example, from the all-female peacekeeping unit from India that served in Liberia, which said that local women actually found this to be very empowering and that they enjoyed interacting with women. I'm not sure if that's because they were women or because they were simply empathetic and good in the sense that they actually related well to people. Other research says that if you're dealing with someone who is armed, trained and wearing a uniform, you're as likely to notice the uniform as you are to notice any other trait or identity marker about that person, and you're much more likely to notice the uniform before you notice the gender.

I don't think there is enough evidence to show that women are somehow naturally trained to relate better to victims of sexual violence, especially because knowing how to respond to victims of sexual violence is something that requires actual training. That training can just as easily be provided to men, and men can just as easily respond to those challenges.

● (1130)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

Moving up a level from operations to actual peace processes, you also mentioned there is more evidence that involving women in the peace process itself yields greater success. Can you say a bit more about that?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: I would say that's a much more broad-based effort aimed at including not just militarized and civilian peace-keepers, but also a much broader universe, as it were, that contains things like civil society organizations and women's grassroots organizations working on peace and security. In those contexts, we do see that the benefits of things like peace arrangements often last longer than they do in situations where women aren't involved.

Again, Liberia is a very good example. The bulk of the effort was made by women's grassroots, non-governmental organizations, which organized things like peace huts. They talked about peace and security. Supporting those organizations in cohort with having peacekeeping operations is what often leads to lasting peace.

Even there, however, we have some concerns now. With Ellen Johnson Sirleaf no longer the president, people are thinking.... There was momentum because a woman very actively involved in the peace movement became president. There was a certain visibility that we now risk losing if we can't keep up the momentum of these movements. Long-term support for women's grassroots NGOs, for example, which know the reality on the ground and support the peace process, is as important as having women in peacekeeping missions.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thanks very much for your contribution this morning.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Fisher is next.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here, Ms. Baruah. I think you bring a really interesting perspective here that we haven't seen yet. This idea of foisting responsibility on women for civilizing peacekeeping operations simply because, as you said, they're not men hadn't occurred to me. I find it very interesting.

In your 2017 article you stated:

> Beyond the issue of women's participation in [peacekeeping operations], we must reflect on the fact that 'militarized peacekeeping' is itself an oxymoron. We should question our sole reliance on militaries to secure peace, and we should interrogate peacekeeping as an endeavour with colonial underpinnings.

Can you elaborate on that a little bit for me?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: Okay. There are several layers to that.

One, as I mentioned in that article, when you look at it, the vast majority of peacekeeping operations are in the global south. There are very, very few in the global north countries, so there is an element of going out and civilizing the natives, things we've heard before that historically we've heard in other narratives, colonial narratives, because colonialism was also justified as being something that was good for people. I think there is a line there that needs to be drawn between saying, "Is this the only way going forward that we can enable lasting peace as a global community? Is the only way to keep the peace through militarized entities?"

Again, as I said before, I understand that in the short term sometimes there is a need for peacekeeping missions, and there have been multiple jokes made, the memes about people in the United States after 2016 asking for a peacekeeping mission in the U.S. These are meant to be funny, but there is something to be said about some of it, the fact that we assume that peace needs to be kept somewhere else in the global south.

That's something I don't think we can do away with right now, but it's a conversation I really want people to think about, because it is about power and it is imbued with a certain history of colonialism.

Having said that, I understand that in the short term there is often a need for peacekeeping missions, and I think we are justified in providing troops to peacekeeping missions, although today the vast majority of peacekeeping troops are also provided by countries in the global south. I don't think Canada has been among the top 20 peacekeeper-contributing countries in probably the past 20 years. We provide a fairly small number in the global scheme of peacekeeping.

We have countries that are used to providing very large numbers of peacekeepers. Today you think of countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. You think of countries in South America, and especially I think of the southern cone countries. We have Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay that are major contributors today, troop-contributing countries, to peacekeeping. I think that instead of just continuing this practice now of pulling people into institutions that I'm not sure have worked that effectively to building lasting peace—

● (1135)

Mr. Darren Fisher: What else should we integrate into our peacekeeping missions then, through both the UN and Canada?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: I was very pleased that as part of the feminist international assistance policy right now, there is $150 million, I want to say, that is being targeted for the support of NGOs of women's grassroots organizations. I think that is absolutely vital and I think it's complementary. It's very effective and it's complementary. I think supporting local organizations, organizations in the context in which the peace is being kept, as it were, that know what to do on the ground and know how to organize and know how to mobilize people towards peaceful lives is as important as and complementary to the idea of militarized peacekeeping, while I acknowledge that sometimes militarized peacekeeping is necessary.

Mr. Darren Fisher: When we talk about increasing women's participation in PKOs, are the language and the expectations surrounding that increase in participation encouraging more women to join?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: That's a difficult question to answer. I think the contexts are different for why people join militaries.

I taught at California State University in the U.S. before I moved back to Canada, and I remember the ROTC being on campus and having genuine difficult recruiting, and at some point we were kind of wondering why. It was because there were so many active conflicts in the world, and there were people who were not as interested in joining militaries, and that was at the same time as the U.S. lifted the "don't ask, don't tell" policy and allowed women in active combat.

Many people chose to see that as a form of post-sexist enlightenment, of post-homophobic, post-sexist enlightenment. The idea was that we were going to have everyone. I was a bit more cynical. I thought it was pure scarcity. They weren't getting enough people to sign up.

Therefore, I think that in different contexts, women are as likely or as unlikely to join militaries. I don't think that's something we can necessarily rally around and encourage women to join. If they're interested, they will join, and over time we will see change.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Then you don't think we should work to find ways to make them feel more inclusive in the peace process?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: Absolutely, but that will require transforming institutions much more deeply than just incrementally increasing small numbers of women.

Mr. Darren Fisher: You talk about 50% of the population, about maybe the approach now around the world is that it's nice to have and that it's civilizing peacekeeping operations, but offer us some advice. What specifically can we do to do it the right way, to encourage women to participate? I'm probably just about out of time.

In 30 seconds or less, what's one thing we and the UN could do to encourage more women to participate?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: There isn't anything that isn't being done. I think women who want to join the military will join the military. They join police forces. I don't see any one thing that can be done.

Of course, addressing the culture and talking about power are really important. It's not a quick fix. Also, what we often don't hear about is a lot of research about the level of sexual abuse and exploitation of women within the military. I think we need to address those issues. You need to fix the institutions.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It's my pleasure.

We'll go to five-minute questions.

The first questions go to MP Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Professor Baruah, thank you very much for being with us. I only have five minutes, so I'm going to be judicious in how I ask my questions.

The first thing I wanted to do is thank you for the value that you're adding to our discussion by unpacking and dispelling assumptions and by focusing on evidence-based research and ultimately policy. I think that's equally important in the social sciences and humanities as it is in the natural sciences.

Are you making the point to the committee that we should move away from a complementarity of instrumental and rights-based approaches in the sense that we sometimes like to use instrumental approaches when it suits us, when we think it will create the momentum or the prop wash?

We also do it on gender equality with respect to the economic contributions. If we had pay equity tomorrow across the globe, I think the evidence is that it would be an economic benefit in excess of $10 trillion, so you pull men into the conversation who haven't previously been part of it. Do you advocate for that, or should we bifurcate and stick with the rights-based approach?

● (1140)

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: That's a really good question, and I've faced it multiple times.

One thing I feel very strongly about is that even when I'm doing this work and I'm speaking to businesses, for example, whose bottom line is they are beholden to shareholders. They care about profits. We know that. The most convincing argument is the business case. We know that. We know that private sector corporations are going to change when it makes sense; when it makes economics change. When we see corporations changing when they have, it is because it makes business sense. They need a diverse pool of talent. We know there are all these benefits to having women on boards. We know they are doing it because of the business case.

I make a bit of a difference when I'm talking about democratically elected government. I think we should care about equity for the sake of equity. I think it's a bit different when you're not talking to corporations. I think in that context we should care about equity, regardless of what the outcome might look like.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: I think that's super-helpful in this context. Thank you for that point.

I'll go back to peacekeeping for a second.

In my mind three cultures have to be broken down to ensure parity, or at least the approach toward parity in peacekeeping.

The first one is the culture of the troop-contributing country. The second is the culture of whatever coalition is going to gather to solve the problem, whether that's NATO or the UN or some other constellation. The last one is the culture in the host government, less euphemistically the target government.

Is that the right way to think about it? If so, where do you see the greatest obstacles at the moment in the research that you're doing, and at which level? Could you speak from a Canadian perspective, perhaps?

Is it the NATO coalition or the UN coalitions where you have peacekeeping cultures from all around the world coalescing? Then the significance of women being part of it is usually secondary or tertiary or even less frank than that, but then you also have cultures in the countries we're assisting where it may not be helpful culturally to consider putting a woman into a leadership position.

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: In the research I look at, I think the biggest barrier is the power dynamic in the interface between the peacekeeping operations. I haven't see as much about whether coalitions are a bigger problem than.... That doesn't seem to be the point of friction as much, at least from the research I've done, but I do think that being able to change the perception of peacekeepers... because as I said, a local population where the peace is being kept is as likely to see the uniform as they are to see the gender, so it makes no difference. They're seeing armed personnel. It has the same effect that armed personnel have in many parts of the world. They're not necessarily seen as people who are peacekeepers.

As Canadians we do benefit, I think, from having a slightly different reputation overseas, and I'll admit that. I had a graduate student do research on understanding how Canadians are perceived in Afghanistan. We found that we were perceived a little bit differently from those from other countries that have sent troops, for example, so I think we do benefit from that a bit. However, I do think the culture of peacekeeping is also still extremely formalized, often for security reasons, so I wonder about the conversations about how peacekeepers can build these friendships and these wonderful connections with local populations and how that can happen when most peacekeeping happens in a very formalized context. You're not allowed to leave the base often as peacekeepers. You're not allowed to break bounds after dark, for example, so in these very formalized contexts, how can you actually build peace?

I think we need to create forms for better interaction. I do think some of the grassroots organizations that already exist can perhaps provide that nice intermediary function, can play an intermediary function that can be useful.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: That's very helpful.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Martel is next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Good morning.

In your November 2017 article entitled, "Short-sighted commitments on women in peacekeeping", which could be translated as "*Engagement à courte vue concernant les femmes dans le maintien de la paix*", you say that one of the reasons why the Trudeau government is making this effort to increase the number of women assigned to peace operations is that he is campaigning for a temporary seat on the UN Security Council.

In your opinion, to what extent does his ambition for diversity correspond to obtaining a seat on the Security Council? Would you say that's the main consideration?

● (1145)

[*English*]

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: No, I would not. I hope I didn't make it sound as though that is the primary consideration. I think it's part of a broader effort of moving us back towards a different place at the UN, and I appreciate that. There is tremendous power to be had in being in the UN General Assembly. There is tremendous power. I do believe the UN General Assembly is a good forum for Canadians to take Canadian values to. I do believe that. The non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council is something that countries aspire to hold, and I understand that Canada wants that position. I wouldn't suggest that it's the only reason, but it's definitely a part of the attempt to raise Canada's status at the UN. There's no question about it.

In the past 10 years or 20 years, just as a peacekeeping nation, which is a very distinct marker for Canada, that definitely didn't fit, because we were barely contributing any troops, and there wasn't that much activity happening. I think now we are trying to say that we're back. That is very much part of that packaging of our being back. I'm not so cynical as to say that it's entirely a public relations campaign or that it's a grand gesture, but I do think that it is something that Canada is doing to try to raise our status at the UN.

The Chair: You have three more minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: My next question is broad.

If you had to put in place a plan to increase recruitment and retention of women in the Canadian military, what would it look like?

I know it's a big question.

[*English*]

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: That is a big question. There is a much deeper reckoning to be had in terms of how militaries operate and how institutional hierarchies and reporting mechanisms operate. It's not a secret that we have issues with women in the military, and in Canada we have issues with the RCMP. This is not a secret anymore.

Unless we really reform our institutions, it's misguided and perhaps even a little dangerous to assume you can just add women to institutional structures as they exist, send them overseas and somehow expect a different result. That's the problem I have with it. An effort to increase women in peacekeeping operations has to go hand in hand with the efforts made by police forces, militaries and the RCMP in Canada to genuinely reform these institutions and make them more democratic and representative. That's the way forward for peacekeeping missions. It can't be something that is just addressed within peacekeeping operations; it has to address all the other institutions.

The Chair: MP Gerretsen is next.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your contribution to this. You've really highlighted an interesting way of looking at this, because you've kind of turned this issue on its head. It's important that you did that, because a lot of the discussions about why it's so important to have women in peacekeeping have centred around this idea of...I think your term was "civilizing" the peacekeeping operations, and you've done a very good job of illustrating why it's so important to look at it from a different perspective.

In 2017 Canada hosted the UN peacekeeping conference, at which Minister Freeland announced $15 million as a pilot project to fund women's participation. You commented on this in your opening remarks, but what do you think of where that money was spent? I'm taking it from you that if the environment is correct, then women are just going to want to get involved, but that money was specifically put towards recruiting, training and promoting females. Is that the wrong place to be spending the money?

● (1150)

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: No, not at all; that was never my argument. I don't think there's anything wrong. It's actually a fairly small amount of money if you think about it, and they might need more than that. I don't see anything wrong with spending that money on improving women's experiences, training and recruitment. That's not the argument I was making at all.

We should just be cognizant of that attempt to tick so many boxes, namely that it will also make a difference and that it will also be able to transform the institution. That's not going to happen by just making an effort to add more women.

We use a term in feminist research that you can't "add women and stir". You can't add them, like you would add sugar to tea, and stir and expect a different result. That's what I'm anxious about, but on the face of it, there's nothing wrong with spending that money to improve access to training and make efforts at recruitment. I don't have a problem with that.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: The objective of our peacekeeping study is to present recommendations back to the government. What recommendations would you give us to give back to the government as regards women in peacekeeping?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: I would say to try to change institutional cultures at a deeper level. Changing institutional cultures that foster behaviours like harassment and bullying will make a much bigger difference, because if we leave intact the structures that are problematic, then having more women added to those structures won't actually change the institution. Women in small numbers will either look away or become part of that larger structure.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That is what you argued in your thesis.

You're arguing from a perspective of diversity—that it's the diversity that's going to make it better—as opposed to the specific gender, because there's no paternal measure to this. Would you argue that broad diversity is just as important as gender diversity?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: Hugely. In fact, all the research that has been done, even on peacekeeping operations, suggests that all of those things matter. It matters much more to have race, gender, education, language, nationality all factored in. I think it's really important to think of diversity in intersectional terms—you can be a woman and also be a person of colour, as I am. I think those identities are very important to consider, but then the danger is in assigning specific categories to people. When you read transcripts, for example, from the British when they were in India, they wanted to recruit Sikhs because they said they were a martial race. How offensive is that today, that Sikhs are good fighters because they're a martial race. To me, we would obviously never go anywhere with that argument. I find it a little troubling when that same argument can still be used, because it's an affirmative essentialism about women, and I don't think it does us any good.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you for coming. I found your presentation and your thesis very compelling and interesting.

The Chair: Thank you.

You're right on time, Mr. Gerretsen.

MP Boucher, the floor is yours.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): I will split my time with my friends here, and I will try to do it in French.

[*Translation*]

I find your comments very interesting. I'm one of those women who think like you. In fact, you say that women should be able to engage in peacekeeping for the same reasons as men, without being charged with civilizing operations or making them more effective.

As a women, I have a little difficulty accepting the use of the word "woman" when making reforms. It gives the impression that we are second-rate. In my opinion, equality is about being a female member of Parliament in the same way as my male colleagues. I don't need a document to use the female gender because I know I am as good as my male colleagues.

Can the fact that we absolutely want to specify gender bring certain difficulties to women who, like me, think we are equal to men?

Gentlemen, I'm sorry, but sometimes I think women are superior to men in many ways, because we give birth for instance.

Can naming gender in a document give women the impression that we are doing it precisely to push them back and lead them where we want?

● (1155)

[*English*]

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: I don't think those two things are mutually exclusive. When a group of people have been under-represented significantly in an institution, then I think saying we should treat everyone equally doesn't make any sense because that group has been historically under-represented. By that I don't mean that we should be putting people who are not qualified or trained into those jobs. That's where they get into so much trouble with affirmative action in the U.S., for example, because people hear those words and assume that you're going to be putting people who are unqualified and untrained in these positions. Of course we have to make sure that people who are joining these institutions are fully trained and equal, but I think it's that difference between equality and equity.

Sometimes I use the image where you have one person who is six feet tall, one person who is five foot eight, and one person who is four foot 11. They're trying to see something in the distance and looking over a wall. Obviously, the person who is six feet tall has a really nice view, but if we talk about equality, treating people equally, they should all be standing on the same level. If you want to talk about equity, you have to give a slightly higher platform to the person who is only four foot 11 to be able to see it.

When organizations so clearly have one group of people who have been under-represented, I think the equality argument is quite deceptive, in the sense that of course people are equal. Politically, we're equal. But in that particular case, because one group has been historically marginalized, when we start thinking about how we increase diversity in that organization, it's not enough to treat everyone equally, because if you treat everyone equally you're just going to prolong the status quo. You have to make a special effort to give people who have been under-represented.... That's not charity. You're not doing it because these people are weaker or need help. You're doing it to compensate for historical and contemporary marginalization.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Gallant, go ahead.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We don't really have any experience in recent so-called peacekeeping. We have Afghanistan. You mentioned that we were viewed differently. What in our military was unlike other militaries? The soldiers who went over there, both male and female, received cultural awareness training, and that lent greatly to that difference that was perceived, but you mentioned systemic problems in the military with respect to behaviour.

Do you think that creating a new position or department in government is more important than actually fixing the problems where, for example, on a military base—the odd one, not all—the sexual assault of women is the norm rather than the exception?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: Again, I don't think we need to pick one or the other. If there is a special vehicle that is needed to address that specific problem, by all means we should have it, but I don't think that this should delude us into believing that this special vehicle is going to solve the problem when you need the solutions to be spread across all the different parts of the institution.

If there is a perceived need for that—and I don't know about it—then, yes, I do think that we should design a special vehicle, or you can think about somebody who is willing to champion those issues. In general, in studying institutions, I find that when these issues.... Lasting change often comes when at the most senior levels people believe that they're really going to make a difference and they really want to change things.

I think we need to see the commitment to change, the commitment to changing institutional structures that support...or perhaps not "support", but that don't challenge things like harassment and bullying. I think those efforts need to come from as high up in the institution as possible for them to make a difference.

It's not even enough if it's.... You definitely need a critical mass of people who want to change things, but I think it needs to come from above. I think special vehicles are good, but often they have the effect of convincing people that things are being taken care of—for example, we formed this committee to take care of this issue, so it must be solved.

● (1200)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: MP Dzerowicz, go ahead.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your excellent presentation. It has actually brought out a lot of my own emotions, because I've only ever worked in male-dominated professions, and I've always been the minority. For a lot of your comments, it's been either "I totally disagree" or "I totally agree", so there has been a lot of emotion for me.

First, I really appreciated your clarifying that Canada deciding to go into Mali is not just a PR exercise. It really is part of a much broader approach about us re-engaging in the world, wanting to contribute to peace operations and to the UN, and helping to change that institution and actually drive some changes forward. That's in addition to trying to introduce our feminist international policy assistance and the money that you so rightly pointed out, around $150 million, where we're trying to build capacity in a number of countries to empower women and girls at the local level. I appreciated your making that statement. I think it's an important one. It's a much broader agenda that we're trying to do.

I hear what you're saying, that when you add women, you do not automatically change peacekeeping right away. There are things around addressing local culture, changing organizations, dealing with power structures, training and building local capacities.

One of the things I always struggle with is that part of me thinks, "Why wouldn't we move right away to a quota?" I completely agree with you that for someone who is a woman and maybe an executive for a large organization, if there are only two women out of 15 people, they're not going to change anything, but if I have eight out of 15, I might actually have a big influence. Why wouldn't we move to something like a quota?

Mr. Bipasha Baruah: I've been asked this as well several times.

It was considered a huge move that Canada recently.... We have comply or explain now, which is the lowest bar. There's comply or explain, then there are targets, and then there are quotas. Unfortunately, quotas are burdened with all of these things. There's a historical legacy of quotas, and again, it's not me who has any issues with it.

I think countries that have adopted quotas in politics have done really well. I'm talking about Norway, Germany, or France, for example. They have fulfilled the number of women on boards. They've actually done far better than countries that just have targets, and they've definitely done far better than countries that have comply or explain requirements, like Canada, the U.K. and Australia.

My fear with quotas is that, again, we end up hurting the people we are trying to help. We're trying to diversify these institutions, and quotas actually do that very effectively because these are legal quotas. If you don't fulfill legal quotas, you are in violation of the law, which makes a big difference. The problem is that quotas have to be maintained for a significant period to be effective, because groups of people who have not previously been given a seat at the table often need time to learn once they do get that seat at the table. There is that assumption, for example.

The example that people keep using is Rwanda, because today it has the biggest number of women in parliament. I think 64% are women. Remember that Rwanda actually adopted legal quotas, but the quotas were only for 30%, if I remember correctly. If the accusations that people make were true—that if you put women into these positions, they're not that effective and they're often just little shoo-ins for men and will do what the majority group does—we would never have gotten to 64%. They would have stayed at just 30%.

I think that in Rwanda, even if they remove the quotas, we're never going to see the number of women go back to 9% or 10% because there's been enough time to have a demonstration effect, so that women can say, "Yes, we can do this. This is the norm; this is nothing unusual." I think that's the big difference.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: That's helpful in terms of my own thinking.

We're looking at peacekeeping missions. Sitting here for two seconds and listening to you, I understand there's a colossal number of factors that make them successful or not. There are the complexity factors. There's the culture of the peacekeeping teams. There's the culture of the local community. There's the training of the peacekeeping teams. There's the diversity of the teams.

If we were making recommendations for Canada—because Canada would like to be a larger part of the UN—what is it that...? We must have learned something from our peacekeeping missions in the past. Based on that learning, based on all the complexities of these factors, what is it that Canada...? If we go into the UN and we want to have, for example, better quality or more successful peacekeeping teams, what recommendations should we be working on with the UN to ensure we have more successful and equitable missions moving forward?

● (1205)

Mr. Bipasha Baruah: You know GBA+, gender-based analysis plus, the one that doesn't just consider gender but all the other factors that I mentioned, the identity markers. I think that's something peacekeeping missions should take far more seriously, that the identities of peacekeepers are more complicated and go beyond just gender. When I say that, I absolutely don't mean that women are not important. There's nothing to say that women can't represent other identities, which may be stronger for them.

There's a lot that shows that. I've done research with indigenous women. For example, I recently did some work for Natural Resources Canada. The indigenous women I interviewed said that they considered race a far bigger identifier for them than gender. Basically, racism was a bigger problem for them than sexism.

GBA+ is now policy in Canada. I think Canada could very actively promote GBA+ as being important for peacekeeping missions to consider.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Oh, I'm being cut off. Okay, thank you.

The Chair: The next question will go to MP Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to return to the question of the reaction of local populations to peacekeepers, and to the question of better interaction. I think you emphasized that there isn't a lot of evidence.

I know from my personal experience as a police board member that when we added members to the police force, we added women and we added members of minority communities. The police force reported back with anecdotal evidence of an automatic improvement in relations due to better contacts and better communication.

When we're saying that there isn't a lot of evidence, it still might be true—if we actually did that research—that having more diversity could promote better relations with local populations. We're just saying there hasn't been a lot of study of that. Is that what we're after?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: It could be, but the other thing that needs to be addressed is that the interactions between peacekeepers and local populations are so formal. There's very little opportunity.

It's always funny to read things that talk about these kinds of utopian visions of peacekeepers and friendships with local populations. The structures of peacekeeping missions don't even allow that to happen, because often you're not even allowed to leave the base.

Diversity is important, and it's very good, beyond just gender, but it's also important to create mechanisms by which peacekeepers can actually interact more meaningfully, and perhaps in less formalized circumstances, with local populations. That's where a lot of grassroots organizations that work in those contexts should be brought in more effectively.

One more point I'd like to make is that, in Afghanistan, one of the things we looked at was how Canadians interacted with local civil society organizations. We found that we're not actually very good at recognizing what civil society organizations look like in global contexts. When we talk about NGOs, we expect a certain type of representation, whereas in Afghanistan the organizations that made the most difference were often associated with religion, for example. There were local women's groups, which were organizing in mosques, and they don't call themselves NGOs. They're just these grassroots groups that have tremendous power in those settings. Learning to broaden our notions of what exactly civil society organizations look like on the ground and not being very tied to our secular ideas of what they look like is very important as well.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Yes. My own experience in peacekeeping abroad has been with NGOs, so I really want to second that. Quite often, significant groups, and in particular women's groups, were overlooked in those processes—

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: Always.

Mr. Randall Garrison: —because they weren't formally structured in ways that we expected.

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: They meet in basements, that sort of thing, and often don't have resources. In that regard, I also really like the fact that this $150 million is not tied. They want to give it to organizations that are already doing the right thing on the ground, and not micromanaging them to say, "Do this" or "Do that." I think that's the right approach.

Mr. Randall Garrison: I hope I'm going to get away with one last question.

As a research chair, would you say there is sufficient funding available for the type of research you would like to see?

● (1210)

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: Are you going to give me money?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Is there sufficient money already available to you to fund this type of research?

Dr. Bipasha Baruah: I feel very fortunate. I do feel very well funded because just the title of being a Canada research chair is a good one. I do well. I get really good funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. I actually get a fair bit of research money from everywhere.

To be completely honest, what I feel we do have a need for is to be able to do more exploratory work. If we have a good hunch about something and need to do a pilot project, the results may be very different from what we anticipated. Being able to do exploratory work to understand these issues is really important.

We need more people involved. I have students who are studying these topics, but policy really needs to be informed by evidence and not by ideology or intuition, which is what I find. A lot of the assumptions and ideas about what women can do in these missions tend to be more intuitive or ideological than anything else—that women are good so they'd be able to do this. The more evidence we can present, the more research we can do. It's important, especially now, because there are peacekeeping missions in which there are significant numbers of women.

In some places, there are all-female peacekeeping units, such as the India example or the Bangladesh example. Again, I have mixed feelings about them. Sometimes I think it's a grand gesture in style to show how well women in this country are doing, whereas India, for example, still has huge problems with sexual violence. It's the lowest-rated country for gender equality in the G20. I do think it ends up being a bit of a public relations exercise, but we have opportunities for grounded research that would enable us to understand the contributions that these groups make, that women make, as peacekeepers. Are they different? Are they really different such that we can actually say women make different contributions?

I would welcome funding to do that work. I do think we have enough, but some funding for smaller exploratory projects would also be very helpful.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much for being with us.

The Chair: Professor, thank you for coming today. The committee enjoyed your testimony. It adds value to what we're trying to achieve here. We appreciate your taking the time to be here. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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